

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, October 25, 2022
Virtually

EAC members present –D. Beane, A. Sellers, B. Vitale, S. Bach, S. Thompson

Others present – S. Smith, S. Bachman, B. Ayers-Fisher, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, B. Davis

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Beane called the meeting to order at 12:02 pm. He noted that a quorum was present.

All those present introduced themselves.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Ms. Sellers, seconded by Mr. Vitale, to approve the September 27, 2022 meeting summary as written. Motion carried unanimously.

UPCOMING MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Ms. Ayers-Fisher announced the following upcoming events:

- Active Transportation Plan public meetings today at the RHS LGI Room beginning at 4 pm and 7 pm. Both presentations will be the same. The Plan will be circulated for comment and will be presented to City Council for their approval. The Active Transportation Plan will take other users of City streets into account, not only motorized vehicles.
- EPA public meeting regarding Exide this evening at 7 pm in the Muhlenberg High School auditorium. She stated that she will be attending this meeting and will report back to the EAC.

Mr. Beane stated that off-site sampling will occur in mid-November. He noted the need to meet with EPA Region 3 about the remediation process and the impacts to Bernhart's. He expressed the belief that the City should have become involved in this process sooner.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that Council would like to hold a meeting with Muhlenberg residents about Bernhart's. She expressed the belief that this short notice will result in low attendance at the EPA meeting. She noted the need to be creative with the future of Bernhart's and to understand that many are still mourning the loss of the lake. She suggested that the EAC attend the meeting with residents.

- Reading Iron Playground community meeting on October 26 at 6 pm to obtain input on the design of the new playground
- Reading Public Library Book Club October 27 at 166 Franklin St West Reading at 6 pm – "Intersectional Environmentalist"

STAFF UPDATES

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she will be at Bernhart's on Thursday to plant trees to stabilize the sediment and stream bank.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the energy contract is complete and covers a three year period. She stated that the City will purchase RECs to bring the City's sustainable energy use to 40%. She stated that the cost is approximately 7 cents per KWH and that this project is now complete.

Mr. Bachman stated that the Heritage Park outfall project is complete. He described the sanitary sewer emergency in the 6th & Buttonwood area. He stated that the project is nearing completion and has moved to the intersection of 6th & Church Sts. He stated that the rainy weather has delayed repairs.

Mr. Vitale questioned what the problem is. Mr. Bachman stated that a 12" clay sanitary main that is buried 20' below the surface collapsed and had backfilled. He stated that 265' of piping needs to be replaced with 40' remaining to be repaired. He stated that the issue was discovered when a sinkhole was reported. He stated that bypass pumps have been temporarily installed and that RAWA is also replacing its 12" mains in the area. He stated that there were also complications with gas and fiber optic lines.

Mr. Vitale quoted a sign he had seen in the past "This temporary inconvenience will provide permanent improvements".

Mr. Beane stated that Reading's infrastructure is aging and these types of situations may increase.

Ms. Davis encouraged all to attend the Active Transportation Plan meetings this evening. She expressed the belief that renderings would be available for the public to view. She stated that the City is working with Simone Collins on this Plan and that it will take walking and biking into account. She stated that she will also be attending and will provide feedback.

Mr. Vitale questioned if the Plan will be presented at neighborhood group meetings. Ms. Davis stated that she is unsure. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that it will not be presented to neighborhood groups. She stated that the Active Transportation Plan will be a component of the Downtown + Plan and will incorporate the Greening Penn Street Plan. She stated that the improvements will begin downtown and then move into the neighborhoods. She stated that there is a tight timeline but that an additional comment period is planned. She stated that the draft Plan will also be posted on the City's website. She stated that the work group will begin finalizing the Plan in December.

Ms. Sellers questioned if this Plan will take connectivity into account and be compatible with the County Bike Plan. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that both are being incorporated. She stated that the Schuylkill River Greenways Plan has been updated and is being incorporated as well. She stated that there are also multi-model considerations around S 7th St to tie in the train station and the bus station.

Mr. Vitale questioned the format of this evening's meetings. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that there will be a presentation with questions & answers. She stated that attendees will also be able to view and comment on the renderings. She stated that both sessions will be the same.

SIGNAGE PROJECT

Ms. Sellers questioned if Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) has followed up with Ms. Ayers-Fisher. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that there has been more staff turnover and that a new plan may be needed.

Ms. Sellers stated that she will contact PWD to follow up.

Ms. Ayer-Fisher stated that it will be helpful if the signage is consistent throughout the watershed.

Ms. Sellers provided background on the project for Mr. Thompson's benefit. She stated that the signage will help educate residents about green storm water solutions.

Mr. Beane stated that the EAC has a small budget that is generally used toward education.

MEMBER UPDATE

Ms. Smith stated that there is one new person in process. She noted her hope that the applicant will be interviewed by the Nominations & Appointments Committee in November so that he can be engaged at the November meeting.

PLASTIC BAG BAN

No report.

BROWNFIELDS DATABASE

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she attended the PA Environmental Professionals Conference and learned about ERIS. ERIS compiles an ASTM map of a 10 square mile area to get baseline information and a Physical Setting Report (PSR) for approximately \$2,000. She stated that additional information can be compiled at an additional cost as needed. She stated that this would allow the City to have its own environmental information and not be reliant on developers.

Mr. Beane agreed with the need for baseline information.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher suggested having ERIS do additional studies at specific project locations to benefit Zoning, Planning, Trades, etc. and for staff to have better access to the information. She stated that the map can be added to the City's website for public access as well.

Mr. Beane expressed the belief that this is part of the EAC's educational mission. He questioned if the Public Works budget would be used or if the EAC budget should be used. He stated that the EAC has been trying to move this project forward for several years.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the map will be purchased through the Public Works budget.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Ms. Smith questioned the meaning of the acronym ASTM. Mr. Vitale stated that ASTM is American Society for Testing and Materials. He stated that this is reliable information and is a highly regarded source for professionals. He questioned if EAC action is needed to move the purchase of this information forward. He agreed that it will be valuable information.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that having the information will help internally for the City to do its due diligence. She stated that the information is comprehensive and a site is considered clear based on ERIS reporting.

Mr. Vitale stated that the most common concerns he hears from the public are climate change and hazardous sites. He expressed the belief that this will help the public gain a better understanding of site issues and agreed that it should be posted publicly.

Mr. Beane stated that the ASTM is comprehensive but not exhaustive. He stated that many sites are cleaned to a site specific standard and the covenants are missing and not recorded with the Recorder of Deeds. He noted the need for industry reliability. He agreed that this mapping will be a tremendous leap forward but cautioned that additional site specific research will be needed.

Ms. Sellers stated that BMPs must also be recorded. She questioned if they would be included by ERIS. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that they would be part of the Physical Setting Report.

Mr. Beane noted that staff in the Recorder of Deeds office has difficulty categorizing clean-up information and that some items may not appear during cursory research.

Mr. Beane stated that the EAC endorses moving forward with ERIS.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher suggested using summer interns to verify the database and research documents with the Recorder of Deeds.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Mr. Beane stated that both EPA and DEP have made environmental justice a high priority and have created Environmental Justice Departments. He stated that all projects will be looked at through an environmental justice lens and that Reading

is within an environmental justice region. He stated that funding may be available for projects.

Ms. Sellers questioned if the ERIS map would assist with environmental justice issues. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that this can be an added layer in the City's GIS system.

Ms. Sellers expressed the belief that the ASTM map would also assist with grant writing.

SCHUYLKILL RIVER CONTAMINATION

Mr. Beane stated that Rev. Morrison brought this issue to City Council's attention.

Ms. Smith stated that she has no new information about the situation.

Mr. Beane assumed that this issue was relative to the Buttonwood Gateway area. He stated that clean-ups of the area have been done to protect human health and that the hazardous area of the American Chain and Cable site area has been capped. He stated that the cap will prevent migration of contaminants into the soil and the water. He stated that Rev. Morrison has brought this to the EAC in the past and it has been thoroughly researched. She has been told that there is no further health risk. He stated that he is unsure of next steps without additional information.

Ms. Smith stated that she will invite Rev. Morrison to the November meeting.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she has looked into the situation and stated that except for the chloroform project there is no river research at this time, especially regarding flesh-eating bacteria.

Ms. Bach suggested that this was related to water quality issues at Blue Marsh. Ms. Ayers-Fisher agreed but stated that there were no flesh-eating bacteria at Blue Marsh.

Ms. Sellers expressed the belief that making these types of statements without substance is scary.

Mr. Vitale suggested providing the EAC's response to Rev. Morrison in writing. Mr. Beane stated that the information regarding the Buttonwood Gateway was

previously provided in writing. He agreed that Rev. Morrison should be invited to the next meeting for additional information so that research can begin if necessary.

Ms. Smith offered to check with the members of the Board of Health to see if they are aware of cases of flesh-eating bacteria and what the cause may be.

Mr. Beane stated that he recently saw Dr. Kimball and they discussed West Reading's consideration of removing fluoride from their water system. She stated that she may ask the EAC for assistance.

2023 MEETING SCHEDULE

Ms. Smith reviewed the proposed meeting schedule for 2023. After a brief discussion about summer meeting locations, the June meeting location will be at Egelman's Park.

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

Mr. Vitale provided background on this Committee to update Mr. Thompson.

Mr. Vitale stated that there is a vacuum of outreach due to City staff capacity. He stated that Mr. Nazario and Ms. Chesson have decided not to continue in their roles but that the EAC now has a foundation to build from. He suggested that a new person be engaged and suggested possible internships.

Mr. Beane stated that the EAC is once again feeling urgency to spend their 2022 budget before the end of December. He noted the need for the Communications Committee to bring its proposal to the November EAC meeting.

Ms. Davis disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Mr. Vitale noted the need to continue engagement on the Sustainability Plan and the six pillars.

Ms. Sellers questioned if interviews of candidates would be held. Mr. Vitale stated that they would.

Mr. Vitale suggested that if members know of anyone that is interested in this position to let him know.

Ms. Sellers stated that if the signage is not ready to move forward in 2022 that she would support spending the EAC's 2022 budget to engage another person for community outreach.

Mr. Vitale stated that he will be speaking with Ms. Curran-Myers next week about how to move forward. He suggested that the City may advertise the position if needed and again suggested an internship.

Mr. Thompson noted the need to build the EAC's social media presence.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher noted the need to review the job description.

Mr. Vitale stated that the person also needs to know the Reading community.

Ms. Smith stated that she can work with HR if advertising is needed.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she can also work with her college contacts.

Mr. Vitale also suggested recruiting from Barrio Alegria.

Mr. Thompson stated that he would like to join this Committee. He suggested a meeting to outline the work to be done and to review the job description.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she has been working with the Planning Commission Chair to move the Comprehensive Plan forward. She stated that the Active Transportation Plan, Sustainability Plan, Downtown + Plan, etc. will be combined into the Comprehensive Plan. She thanked Ms. Sellers for sharing Complete Streets Plans that can also be included.

Ms. Sellers stated that Complete Streets standards are also needed for consistency.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the City's Chief Building Official is also interested in having Complete Streets standards. She stated that this topic is currently under discussion.

Ms. Sellers also noted the need to include Complete Streets language and standards into RFPs.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, November 22 at noon via Zoom.

Mr. Thompson stated that he is generally available for meetings after 5 pm and can Zoom at noon as needed on his lunch break.

The meeting adjourned at 1:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk